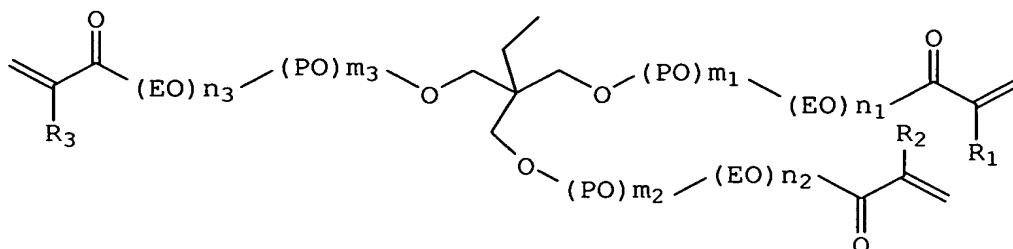


IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently amended) An ester F of the formula I



I

where wherein EO is O-CH₂-CH₂-

PO is independently at each instance O-CH₂-CH(CH₃)- or O-CH(CH₃)-CH₂-

n₁, n₂ and n₃ are independently 4, 5 or 6,

n₁ + n₂ + n₃ is 14, 15 or 16,

m₁, m₂ and m₃ are independently 1, 2 or 3,

m₁ + m₂ + m₃ is 4, 5 or 6, and

R₁, R₂ and R₃ are independently H or CH₃.

2. (Currently amended) ~~An~~ The ester F ~~as~~
~~per of~~ claim 1, wherein n₁ + n₂ + n₃ is 15.

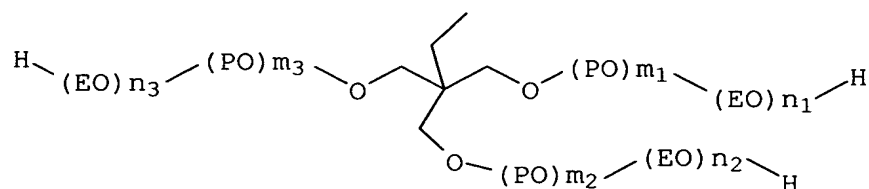
3. (Currently amended) ~~An~~ The ester F ~~as~~
~~per either of elaims~~ claim 1 and 2, wherein n₁ = n₂ =
n₃ = 5.

4. (Currently amended) ~~An~~ The ester F ~~as~~
~~per any of elaims~~ claim 1 to 3, wherein m₁ + m₂ + m₃ is
5.

5. (Currently amended) ~~An~~ The ester F as ~~per any of claims claim 1 to 4,~~ wherein $m_1 = m_2 = 2$ and $m_3 = 1$.

6. (Currently amended) ~~An~~ The ester F as ~~per any of claims claim 1 to 5,~~ wherein R_1 , R_2 , and R_3 are identical ~~and preferably H~~.

7. (Currently amended) A process for preparing an ester F as ~~per any of claims claim 1 to 6 of~~ from an alkoxyated trimethylolpropane of ~~the~~ formula II



II

~~where~~ wherein EO, PO, n_1 , n_2 , n_3 , m_1 , m_2 , and m_3 are each as defined in ~~any of claims claim 1 to 6,~~

~~with~~ and (meth)acrylic acid, comprising the steps of

a) reacting the alkoxyated trimethylolpropane II with (meth)acrylic acid in the presence of at least one esterification catalyst C ~~and of,~~ at least one polymerization inhibitor D , and optionally ~~also of~~ a water-azeotroping solvent E to form ~~an~~ the ester F,

b) optionally removing from the reaction mixture some or all of the water formed in a), during and/or after a),

- f) optionally neutralizing the reaction mixture,
- h) when a solvent E ~~was~~ is used, optionally removing ~~this~~ the solvent E by distillation, and/or
- i) stripping the reaction mixture with a gas which is inert under the reaction conditions.

8. (Currently amended) A The process ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 7, wherein

~~the~~ a molar excess of (meth)acrylic acid to alkoxyated trimethylolpropane is at least 3.15:1, and the optionally neutralized (meth)acrylic acid present in the reaction mixture after the last process step substantially remains in the reaction mixture.

9. (Currently amended) A The process ~~as claimed in either of claims~~ claim 7 ~~and 8~~, wherein the (meth)acrylic acid is not more than 75% by weight removed from the reaction mixture obtained after the last step, which reaction mixture contains the ester F.

10. (Currently amended) A The process ~~as claimed in any of claims~~ claim 7 ~~to 9~~, wherein the reaction mixture obtained after the last process step, which contains the ester F, has a DIN EN 3682 acid number of at least 25 mg of KOH/g.

11. (Currently amended) A The process ~~as claimed in any of claims~~ claim 7 ~~to 10~~, wherein the reaction mixture obtained after the last process step, which contains the ester F, has a (meth)acrylic acid content of at least 0.5% by weight.

12. (Currently amended) A The process ~~as~~
~~elaimed in any of elaims~~ claim 7 ~~to 11~~, wherein the
molar ratio of (meth)acrylic acid to alkoxyated tri-
methyololpropane in ~~reaction~~ step a) is at least 15:1.

13. (Currently amended) A process for pre-
paring a crosslinked hydrogel, comprising the steps of
k) polymerizing an ester F ~~as per any of~~
~~elaims~~ claim 1 ~~to 6~~, with (meth)acrylic acid, ~~with~~ op-
tionally with an additional monoethylenically unsatur-
ated ~~compounds~~ compound.N, and optionally ~~also~~ at least
one further copolymerizable hydrophilic monomer M, in
the presence of at least one free-radical initiator K
and optionally ~~of~~ at least one grafting base L,

l) optionally postcrosslinking the reaction
mixture obtained from k),

m) drying the reaction mixture obtained from
k) or l), and

n) optionally grinding and/or sieving the
reaction mixture obtained from k), l), or m).

14. (Currently amended) A process for preparing a crosslinked hydrogel, comprising steps a) to i) ~~as per any of claims claim 7 to 12~~ and additionally

k) polymerizing the reaction mixture from one of ~~stages~~ steps a) to i) of claim 7, if performed, ~~with~~ optionally with an additional monoethylenically unsaturated ~~compounds~~ compound N and optionally ~~also~~ at least one further copolymerizable hydrophilic monomer M, in the presence of at least one free-radical initiator K and optionally ~~of~~ at least one grafting base L,

l) optionally postcrosslinking the reaction mixture obtained from k),

m) drying the reaction mixture obtained from k) or l), and

n) optionally grinding and/or sieving the reaction mixture obtained from k), l), or m).

15. (Currently amended) ~~Polymer obtainable~~
A polymer prepared according to a the process as per
~~either of claims claim 13 and 14.~~

16. (Currently amended) ~~Crosslinked~~ A
crosslinked hydrogel containing at least one hydrophilic monomer M in ~~copolymerized~~ polymerized form crosslinked with an ester F ~~as per any of claims claim 1 to 6.~~

17. (Cancelled)

18. (Cancelled)

19. (Currently amended) A composition of ~~matter~~ comprising
from 0.1% to 40% by weight of at least one
ester F ~~as per any of claims claim 1 to 5 and (meth)-~~
~~acrylic acid,~~
0.5-99.9% by weight of at least one hydro-
philic monomer M,
0-10% by weight of at least one esterifica-
tion catalyst C,
0-5% by weight of at least one polymerization
inhibitor D, and
0-10% by weight of a solvent E,
with the proviso that the sum total is always
100% by weight.

20. (Currently amended) A The composition
of ~~matter as per~~ claim 19, further comprising
a diluent G ~~ad 100% by weight.~~

21. (Currently amended) Crosslinked A
crosslinked hydrogel ~~obtained prepared~~ from a compo-
sition of ~~matter as per~~ claim 19 ~~or 20 1), and~~ op-
tionally ~~postcrosslinking the reaction mixture obtained~~
postcrosslinked

~~m) — drying the reaction mixture obtained~~
~~directly or from 1), and~~

~~n) — optionally grinding and/or sieving the~~
~~reaction mixture obtained directly or from 1) or m).~~

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Currently amended) ~~Crosslinked~~ A crosslinked hydrogel having a saponification index of less than 10, ~~preferably less than 8.~~

24. (Currently amended) ~~Crosslinked~~ A crosslinked hydrogel ~~as per any of claims 15, 16, 17 or 21 prepared according to claim 13~~ having a saponification index of less than 10, ~~preferably less than 9.~~

25. (New) The ester F of claim 1 wherein R1, R2, and R3 are H.

26. (New) A polymer prepared according to the process of claim 14.

27. (New) An article comprising a polymer prepared according to the method of claim 13.

28. (New) The article of claim 27 selected from the group consisting of a hygiene article, a packaging material, and a nonwoven.

29. (New) The crosslinked hydrogel of claim 23 having a saponification index of less than 8.

30. (New) The crosslinked hydrogel of claim 24 having a saponification index of less than 9.